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C O N F I D E N T I A L BERLIN 001561

STATE FOR EEB/OMA, DRL/ILCSR AND EUR/CE; LABOR FOR ILAB
(BRUMFIELD); TREASURY FOR ICN (KOHLER) AND OASIA
SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 11/19/2018

TAGS: [ECON](#) [EFIN](#) [EINV](#) [ENRG](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [AF](#) [GM](#)
SUBJECT: "YES WE CEM": GREENS ELECT GERMANY'S FIRST ETHNIC
TURK AS PARTY CHAIR

Classified By: Political Minister Counselor Jeffrey Rathke for reasons
1.4 (b,d).

¶11. (SBU) Summary: The Greens elected pragmatic Cem Oezdemir party co-chair -- Germany's first ethnic Turkish national party leader -- during its November 14-16 party convention and sought to jump-start its sagging polls with a "Green New Deal" combining financial market reforms with investment in renewable energy. The party co-chairmanship has diffuse authority, and the 800-delegate convention's more important election was of the left-leaning Renate Kuenast and leftist Juergen Trittin as the party's lead candidates for the 2009 Bundestag elections. On foreign policy, they emphasized promoting human rights, peace, and limited military engagement to a last resort pursuant to a UN mandate. While critical statements were made of NATO, the party passed a resolution recognizing its necessity. Kuenast and Oezdemir highlighted human rights issues, with Kuenast calling upon Germany to help close Guantanamo by resettling some of the detainees and Oezdemir criticizing the Left party for ignoring human rights violations in Russia, China and Cuba. The Greens Party -- Germany's smallest mainstream political party -- is struggling to profile itself in Germany's more crowded five-party political field, where other parties have adopted historically Green causes. End summary.

Oezdemir -- Only New Face

¶12. (C) The main goal of the Greens convention was to rally delegates around the party leadership, and to this extent it succeeded: the 800 delegates voted left-leaning Claudia Roth and pragmatic ("realo") Cem (pronounced "Chem") Oezdemir as party co-chairs with 82.7% and 79.2%, respectively, keeping with the Greens' tradition of electing male-female leadership teams and splitting the co-chairs between "realist" and "fundamental" wings. Roth's better showing indicates a slightly more left-leaning delegate base. More important, however, was the 92% showing for left-leaning Renate Kuenast and Juergen Trittin as the lead candidates for the 2009 Bundestag elections. The smallest of the mainstream parties, the Greens are polling at 9-10%, and are struggling to raise their profile in the crowded five-party political field, where other major parties have, to varying degrees, hijacked positions of the Greens on the environment. Oezdemir's election was also meant to represent a generational change in the Greens, with his predecessor, long-time leader Reinhard Buetikofer, stepping down to leave room for a younger face. However, with Roth, Kuenast and Trittin remaining on top, the Greens core leadership remains largely in place.

Greens Reluctantly Accept Need for NATO, Military Missions

¶13. (SBU) On foreign policy and security, delegates said the Greens had made too many compromises on their "peace agenda"

during the previous SPD/Green government. Despite these views, a broad majority adopted a resolution giving civilian conflict resolution priority but declaring that military missions are justified in special cases pursuant to a UNSC resolution and if such missions are used as a "last resort" to support a peace process. Some delegates expressed the view, however, that the resolution did not go far enough to promote the "true" Green anti-military, anti-NATO, and anti-nuclear weapons position and they feared that the Left Party could present competition in this area. (Note: Coincidentally, the Left Party's Bundestag caucus on November 18 agreed upon a position paper calling for the dissolution of NATO and its replacement of a "regional, non-military, security system." End note.) Both Oezdemir and Kuenast also addressed human rights, with Kuenast calling on Germany to help close Guantanamo by offering to accept some of the detainees. While criticizing Guantanamo, Oezdemir also chastised the Left Party for an inconsistent approach to human rights, accusing that party of ignoring human rights violations in Russia, China and Cuba.

¶4. (SBU) Delegates also vented strong criticism regarding NATO, with one delegate's statement declaring NATO incompatible with a new Greens security concept being met with strong applause. Speaking out in support of NATO, outgoing Greens caucus co-chair Fritz Kuhn managed to push through a resolution which recognized that "NATO is still necessary, for there is no other organization, which can guarantee the security in Europe...." Kuhn, however, was later not re-elected to a position as co-chair of the caucus. Delegates also passed a resolution stating that "Transatlantic partnership and German-American friendship is more than NATO..." but encompasses common historical

experiences and political values, as well as close economic and cultural ties. Delegates also passed a resolution calling for the removal of all U.S. nuclear weapons from Germany. Party co-chair Roth spoke against a missile defense system in Europe and warned of the danger of U.S.-Russian arms race. There was also broad consensus expressed for a change of strategy in Afghanistan, with a major reduction in military forces and more civilian projects.

The Real Deal?

¶5. (SBU) The Greens' newly elected leadership and outgoing co-chair Buetikofer repeatedly stressed the need for their party to take the lead on energy and environmental issues, underlining the party's rejection of nuclear energy and demand for the closing of all atomic energy plants. Calling for a "New Green Deal," Buetikofer spoke of a new societal alliance that links investment in ecological innovation to social justice and economic growth within a better framework of market regulation. Both Buetikofer and his successor, Oezdemir, called for the party to surpass U.S. environmental goals, including with regard to the introduction of renewable energy.

Bio Notes:

¶6. (SBU) Bio notes: Oezdemir has been a member of the Greens since 1981 and from 1994-2002, held a seat in the Bundestag. He left that position due to a scandal related to private use of frequent flyer miles accumulated during official travel. Oezdemir notably failed in October to gain a safe slot on his party's parliamentary list for his home state of Baden Wuerttemberg. He served as a "Transatlantic Fellow" for the German Marshall Fund in Washington in 2003, focusing during this time on the transatlantic relationship and with political organization among minorities in the U.S and Europe. Oezdemir is married with one daughter. He is originally from Baden Wuerttemberg but has a residence in the heavily Turkish Kreuzberg district in Berlin.

Comment

¶7. (C) The Greens are struggling to differentiate themselves within a shifting political landscape, and to reassert their prowess in the environmental/energy arena. Making history with Oezdemir -- and his comparison to Obama -- will not pack enough punch to lift the party in the polls, especially given Oezdemir's less than stellar election results. The question will become how far the Christian Democrats and Social Democrats will go to embrace Green themes, forcing the Greens to reposition themselves or lose relevance. In addition, Bundestag member Irmgard Schewe-Gerigk worried to Poloff during the convention that it will be difficult for the Greens to keep voters focused on environmental issues given the current attention on the financial crisis. This could hurt the party in advance of the 2009 elections, she said.

TIMKEN JR